



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 13, 2008

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Attorney General McGraw Announces Settlement with WV Vein & Skin Centers; \$93,000 Refunded to WV Consumers.

Attorney General Darrell McGraw announced today that his office entered into a settlement agreement with West Virginia Vein and Skin Centers ("WVVSC"), which resulted in \$20,530.54 in refunds and \$72,582.18 in canceled debts for 52 West Virginia consumers. McGraw's office opened an investigation of WVVSC, which has offices in Charleston and Beckley, after receiving a complaint questioning the addition of interest to the amount owed for services rendered by a consumer who was sued.

Further investigation disclosed that WVVSC, owned by George E. Lovegrove, M.D., had filed 52 debt collection suits in Raleigh County Magistrate Court on May 28, 2008. In each suit, WVVSC added interest of 18% per annum to the amount owed for services rendered prior to filing the suit.

State and federal consumer protection laws prohibit a creditor from adding interest or other fees to the amount owed unless there is an intention to extend credit and the charges are disclosed in a special manner required by law. In most instances, bills for medical services are due at the time services are rendered although demands for payment are typically delayed while awaiting response from the consumer's insurance company.

In the agreement, WVVSC promised that it would comply with applicable state and federal law before adding interest or other fees to account balances in the future. WVVSC also agreed to dismiss all 52 lawsuits, refund all payments collected on the accounts in question, and to forgive the entire debt, including both interest and charges for services rendered.

"It is unfortunate that many consumers are not able to pay for medical services in full at the time bills are received and sometimes have difficulty even making acceptable payment arrangements. Nonetheless, medical providers cannot increase the balance owed by adding interest or other fees unless there is a written credit agreement disclosing the fees and charges prior to the time the services are rendered. I commend Dr. Lovegrove for taking prompt remedial action to address our concerns as soon as this matter was brought to his attention. Our office found no evidence that Dr. Lovegrove intended to do anything illegal," Attorney General McGraw stated.

Any persons wishing to file a complaint about a consumer matter or to alert the Attorney General about unfair or deceptive practices may do so by calling the Consumer Protection Hot Line, 1-800-368-8808, or by obtaining a complaint form from the consumer web page at www.wvago.gov.

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